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Central Intelligence Bulletin

State Department review completed

Top Secret

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23 August 1973



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Approved For Release 2004/07/08 : CIA-RDP79T00975A025100070002-4

Approved For Release 2004/07/08 : CIA-RDP79T00975A025100070002-4

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Central Intelligence Bulletin

CONTENTS

25X1

LAOS: Prime Minister Souvanna pushing for showdown
with rightist critics. [redacted] (Page 13)

25X1

25X1

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25X1

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Next 13 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2004/07/08 : CIA-RDP79T00975A025100070002-4

LAOS: PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA IS PUSHING FOR A SHOWDOWN WITH HIS RIGHTIST CRITICS OVER THE CONCLUSION OF A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT WITH THE COMMUNISTS. SOUVANNA HAS SCHEDULED A JOINT MEETING OF THE CABINET AND SENIOR LAO ARMY OFFICERS FOR TODAY, ACCORDING TO THE US EMBASSY. HE WILL SEEK APPROVAL TO SIGN THE PROTOCOL IMPLEMENTING THE FEBRUARY PEACE AGREEMENT ON THE CONDITION THAT THE COMMUNISTS GRANT ONE FINAL CONCESSION--EQUAL STATUS FOR THE COMMUNIST AND RIGHTIST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS IN A NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT. IF THE CONSENSUS OF THE MEETING GOES AGAINST HIM, SOUVANNA HAS IMPLIED THAT HE WILL RESIGN. US EMBASSY OFFICIALS IN VIENTIANE HAVE BEEN CONTACTING KEY RIGHTISTS TO IMPRESS UPON THEM WASHINGTON'S FIRM BACKING FOR SOUVANNA.

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